DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 409 363 TM 026 898

AUTHOR Viechnicki, Karen J.; And Others
TITLE Action Research in a School/University Partnership.
PUB DATE Mar 97
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Chicago, IL, March 24-28, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Action Research; College Faculty; *College School Cooperation; Curriculum Development; Education Majors; Elementary Education; Elementary School Teachers; Higher Education; Methods Courses; *Partnerships in Education; Public Schools; Student Teachers; Student Teaching; *Teacher Education; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Ohio University; *Preservice Teachers

ABSTRACT

The Plains Elementary School/Ohio University Partnership Project began in 1991 as a collaborative effort between a university and a public school to restructure the professional development of preservice teachers, elementary school staff, and College of Education faculty. Each year a cohort group of approximately 25 Ohio University junior-level students spends an academic year at an elementary school at which the school's faculty and college teacher educators provide theoretical frameworks and instruction in teaching strategies that are implemented by preservice teachers in the classroom. Action research is used in the partnership to gather information about student and program performance through two strands in The Plains Project. In one strand, teachers working with the students seek ways to solve classroom problems, and in the other, a university professor attempts to link a curriculum foundations course with work in which preservice teachers are engaged. Experiences of particular student interns illustrate the action research perspective. The action research projects at the Plains School allow both classroom and preservice teachers to place the notion of research into a realistic perspective and to feel a sense of empowerment. (Contains one table and eight references.) (SLD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 409 363

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Karen Viechnicki

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Action Research in a School/University Partnership

Karen J. Viechnicki, Interim Dean
Ohio University, College of Education

Deeder Yanity, Fifth Grade Teacher
The Plains Elementary School

Ryan Olinski, Teacher Intern, The Plains Partnership
The Plains Elementary School

A paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
Chicago, Illinois. March 24-28, 1997

TM026898

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Action Research in a School/University Partnership

Karen J. Viechnicki, Deeder Yanity, Ryan Olinski

The Plains Elementary School/Ohio University Partnership Project began in 1991 as a collaborative effort between a university and a public school. It is an effort to restructure the professional development of preservice teachers, elementary staff, and College of Education faculty. The project is composed of a cohort group of approximately 25 Ohio University junior level students who spend an academic year (approximately 550 hours) at a local elementary school. The school's faculty and a team of College of Education professors provide theoretical frameworks and teaching strategies that are implemented by preservice teachers through in-depth classroom experiences in regular and inclusion classrooms. They collaborate in the planning, development, and delivery of an integrated curriculum for both the elementary students and university students. The Partnership focuses on providing a self-renewing, supporting, and cooperative learning environment for both children and adults (Mingus, 1996). Identified as one of Ohio's BEST Practices of 1996, the project works toward eliminating teacher isolation, creating collaborative work sites, and nurturing reflective practices. One such practice is action research.

Education, as defined by the dictionary, is the act or process of imparting or acquiring general knowledge and of developing the powers of reasoning and judgment (Random House, 1980). Many organizations try to instill this idea into the lives and minds of persons of all ages. Usually a central vision exists that leaders try to infuse into the lives of all members. This vision varies among organizations, but education is woven into the daily lives of all individuals involved. Schools and universities share education as their common goal. They attempt to provide the appropriate educational climate for students to survive in their environment. If schools and universities share similar goals, then how can they work together to refine their ideas and share their knowledge with one another?

Review of Literature: According to the ERIC Clearinghouse, 302 schools and universities have embraced the idea of a school/university partnership (Campoy, 1996). Partnerships take time and effort by both parties and there are many distinct issues that must be planned carefully. A rushed partnership may not develop to its fullest potential. However, time and effort are not the only factors that should be examined most intensively. Schools and universities should examine the benefits that can be derived by students and teachers once the partnership is operational.

Once a partnership has been established, participants must maintain a commitment to their roles. However a partnership, as an entity, does not generate a better environment for the students and teachers. It is the work of those involved that increase the possibilities for a better learning environment. In a partnership, preservice teachers, university faculty, and elementary staff combine experiences and views to form teams that work in classrooms. A goal among all teams

Plains Project/Partnership Timeline

1991-92	Spring 1992	1992-93	1993-94	1994-95	1995-96	1996-97
Planning/Pilot Year	Pilot	First year	Second Year	Third Year	University Partnership Liaison	Fifth Year
25 University Students		22 University Students	22 University Students	23 University Students		26 University Students
			Adjunct Instructor/Coordinator Postions	Action Research-Credit Fee Waiver	Certificated Graduate Student	Adjunct Inst./Coord. Liaison
			Faculty Grad. Credit & Fee Waiver	Graduate Adm. Intership Site		Certificated Graduate Intern
				Student Teacher Supervision/Seminar Pilot Program		Student Teacher Supervision/Seminar Program
						Student Teaching
						Teaching Fellow (graduate level internship)

should be cooperation. Without cooperation, teams do not have a viable chance to achieve goals. Schools and universities must cooperate and collaborate together in order to achieve the common vision that they have for their students (Fergus and Wilson, 1994).

One way that a partnership can achieve this goal is through action research. "Action research in education is research undertaken by the people who actually teach children, supervise teachers, or administer school systems in an attempt to solve their practical problems by using the methods of science...in order that they may know, on the basis of relatively objective evidence, whether or not they are accomplishing the things they hope to accomplish" (Corey, 1953). In a partnership, teachers and university students can use action research as a tool for determining whether their existing approaches are beneficial to classroom students.

The purpose of action research in a school/university partnership is to improve upon some of the inadequacies that are present in the traditional experimental research paradigm. The inadequacies that are present without a partnership are: "(1) the long time lag between research conducted at the university and the implementation of its findings in school settings, (2) the lack of relevance to classroom concerns and realities, and (3) the artificial features of experimental procedures imposed on practitioners" (Catelli, 1995). These inadequacies can only hinder any progress in a school environment. Action researchers seek solutions to real issues and concerns that had to be addressed immediately in the classroom. Action researchers take the situation as is and work with it.

Action research is a more social approach to gathering information allowing collaborative studies between schools and universities to not be limited to a particular theme or lesson. This form of research "takes researchable problems or issues (that) are best identified in the classroom or school, best conducted by practitioners, and ultimately leads to improved practices and action" (Herrick, 1992). By being a social form of research, the collaborators in the partnership "would most likely have personal contact with school personnel, students, parents, board members, and other stakeholders within the community" (Fergus and Wilson, 1994). This type of contact would enable the researcher to become closer to all of the parties involved and would eliminate the majority of the miscommunication that stems from the lack of direct contact.

Because action research is used in a partnership, many levels of professionals are involved and affected. The amount of time and effort that a person puts forth in the partnership is crucial to the results of the research. In addition to time and effort, each collaborator must be willing to share something. Teachers must be willing to open their classroom to the university partners. In turn, university partners must utilize the resources that they have available to them. "Graduate students and/or university faculty, under the guidance of the university's evaluation consultant, have been found to be helpful in assisting teachers in designing evaluations" (Herrick, 1992). It is through the use of resources and cooperation that the full benefits of action research, within a partnership, may be obtained.

A partnership and action research take an enormous amount of time and energy in order to work successfully. Many different areas must first be addressed before the partnership and research can be fully initiated. Funding, responsibilities on the behalf of all members, school and university assistance, and procedures are only a few of the issues that must first be addressed (Campoy, 1996). However, once implemented, successful university and school collaborations can and do take place.

There are a few necessary elements that are constantly reoccurring in all successful partnerships. These partnerships should "1) minimally include a teacher, a researcher, and a staff developer, 2) mutually decide on research questions, data collection and materials development, 3) mutually attend to teachers' definition of their problems, 4) attend to both research and development (implementation) concerns, 5) direct research to the complexity of the classroom, and 6) treat research and development as an intervention in the instructional process" (Herrick, 1996).

Action research can be a valuable tool. This type of research, within a partnership, serves "as a vehicle for obtaining information, reflecting, and taking action" (Catelli, 1995). In doing so, the participants involved are able to experience situations that they may not have been able to encounter otherwise. For instance preservice teachers are able to be a part of classroom experiences prior to teaching in their own classroom. With the proper amount of planning and implementation, action research can serve as a catalyst for informed decision making in the classroom. If the teachers of today and tomorrow are responsible for changing the lives of students, and action research is a change agent, than it would only seem appropriate to position schools and universities to provide the best learning environment possible by promoting ways that personnel can work together effectively.

Methods of Inquiry: Action research began independently in two strands in The Plains Project. In one strand, classroom teachers who worked directly with the university students sought ways to solve problems in their classrooms or team settings. In a second strand, a university professor wanted to link a curriculum foundations course that she taught on site, with work that preservice teachers were engaged in. Both strands of action research developed over three years. The faculty became increasingly sophisticated in identifying problems or issues and designing methods of data collection. The instructor of the curriculum course learned more about leading preservice teachers through a research project. Each year the action research projects improved. During the 1995-96 school year these two strands actually merged as some classroom teachers and preservice teachers chose to work cooperatively on the same action research in the classroom. What follows are descriptions of the action research in which Partnership participants have been engaged.

First Strand. Teachers, with the help of a professor from the College of Education who serves as the site coordinator for the project, met regularly in a study group and explored the area of action research. Problems or issues were identified that individuals or teams wanted to investigate and plans were implemented for data collection. Action research was conducted by teachers at The Plains Elementary School in the 1995-96 school year and an option of earning

graduate credit for research was given. This is a summary of the research that was conducted, what the results of the research were, and changes to teaching strategies as a result of the research.

Kindergarten "Put-Ups." The kindergarten teachers chose to research the topic social skills of five year olds. While the teachers were modeling certain behaviors and correcting negative social behaviors of the children, social skills were not being "taught". It was agreed by these teachers that changes needed to be made in the classroom and in the activities, in the effort to actually teach social skills. One of the changes was to include "Put-ups". Put-ups are the opposite of put-downs. They defined it as a way to make someone feel good, happy or proud.

Six weeks was set aside to conduct the research. During the first week a check list was used to observe the students in class. The checklist was to record the number of times the teacher saw or heard a student using "put-ups". The second week teachers modeled the put-ups on a T-chart. The T-chart included what a put-up looked like: thumbs up, pat on the back, a hug. A put sounded like: "I'll help you.", "Please", "Thank you". Individual interviews were conducted during the third week, along with the observations. The questions that the teachers asked the students included, 1. Tell me one way you could give a compliment/put-up to a friend. 2. What is one way you can help a friend? 3. When do you use the word please?

The fourth and fifth weeks were spent teaching the formal lessons about put-ups. Formal lessons included songs, read aloud books, and games. During the sixth and final week observations and the use of the put-up chart were used. The results of this research was an increase in the use of put-ups by the kindergarten classes. More importantly the teachers were able to gain a better understanding of the students in terms of their social skills. This research was helpful for future planning and teaching for these kindergarten teachers. It was decided to begin teaching formal lessons in social skills at the beginning of the next school year.

Reading Recovery. Another study that was conducted pertained to the effects of the Reading Recovery Program. The teacher wanted to know what percentage of students are maintaining reading accuracy levels at an average or above average level of reading over time in school. Previous research indicates that by first grade, Reading Recovery students become average or better than average readers and they develop a self-extending system which enables them to sustain themselves. The findings of this study showed that 80.6% of students in Reading Recovery have sustained their reading accuracy rates at an average or above average level. These findings have prompted teachers at The Plains to re-think some of the Reading Recovery requirements. While the results show that these students are above the national average, there are 19.4% well below average. Questions about the program are being examined at a local level as well as at the state level.

Spelling and Cooperative Learning. Several teachers were interested in research that pertained to a certain spelling program and cooperative learning in regards to spelling. Several third grade teachers attended a workshop on the Rebecca Sitton's Spelling Program. This

program centers around spelling in the daily activities of any curriculum. One team targeted at-risk students in their classroom. The purpose was to see if test scores improved by using Sitton's high frequency words in sentences written daily on the board and cooperative activities instead of a regular spelling workbook. It was discovered that the model made the greatest impact on the average students. The "at-risk" students scores improved by 4% and the special needs students scores went down by 5%. (They need the patterns that the spelling book provides). Using the same model another teacher wanted to see if students became more responsible for misspelled words. The question that she posed was, "Would using dots in the margin of students' writing journals increase spelling proficiency?" The results of the study showed that by using the dots, students were forced to self-correct their mistakes, which increased the number of words spelled correctly. These findings motivates the teacher to dot each student's journal as often as possible.

Cooperative learning is a challenging and fun way to learn. It builds confidence and self-esteem and it allows for social interaction on an academic level. It gives children the opportunity to learn from their peers and to take ownership for that learning. One teacher in a first grade class wanted to find out if cooperative activities would improve learning in weekly spelling assignments. Cooperative activities were used to practice spelling words. High achievers were partnered with low achievers. The results of cooperative learning was rewarding for all. Test scores for both groups of students increased. As a result of the positive learning that took place, this teacher will continue pairing students, planning cooperative activities, and looking for answers to questions that led to these findings.

Communicating with Parents. Communication is always in need of evaluation and improvement. We would like to think our students are going home and actively discussing their day. Parents are interested in what is going on for the eight hours their children are in school. Unfortunately they do not always receive all the information. Often the important things they should know go unsaid. The question is how do teachers communicate information to parents? A second question is, is it worth the effort to establish a line of communication that the parents look forward to on a consistent basis? For one year a fifth grade teacher sent home with the students a "Wednesday Folder". Each Wednesday she wrote to each child's parent. It was a time commitment that needed to be consistent for it to work. The information included upcoming assignments, tests, test scores, school and class events, and personal information about behavior in class, concerns, and progress being made. Forms were included when necessary. Questions posed included: Did it help parents help their children? Did parents think this was informative enough? Did they discuss information with their children? Did it help them plan?

After approximately eight months of sending the folder home each week, a survey went home (in the Wednesday folder). 86% of the surveys were returned. The results of the survey included: parents did look forward to the information from the teacher, parents shared the information with the student at home, and most parents felt it was a great way to communicate on a consistent basis if necessary. The result of the survey encouraged the teacher to continue with this weekly

form of communication. She concluded that the extra time that it takes to fill out the form and include something personal is worth it.

Second Strand. As part of The Plains Project and the Partnership with Ohio University teachers have been able to participate in an ongoing relationship with students in the College of Education. The first connection made with these students began when they came to our classes as juniors, studying reading, literature, math, social studies and science. They did their field work in classes for one year. Several of these students came back as student teachers. Now with the newest part of the partnership, three of these pre-service teachers are team-teaching with the classroom teachers and conducting action research that is being conducted with the children that they have come to know so well . This research will enable them to write their graduate seminar papers. What follows is the depth and commitment of this research, by the pre-service teachers and the classroom teachers as well.

There are three teams of cooperating teachers and pre-service teachers this year that are conducting action research. Those teams include: a sixth grade teacher and the student teacher in that room, another sixth grade teacher and a graduate student intern, who did his student teaching in this class. There is also a first grade teacher and graduate intern team. The research in the two sixth grade classes is similar in that it is related to the social skills of sixth graders. The difference is that one is very involved and has been ongoing since September, the other one is specific to quality children's literature and certain social characteristics.

Intern: Research Team 1. Miss Buskirk is doing her student teaching this quarter in Mrs. Kroutel's classroom. She was in the Plains Project as a senior and is currently involved in the masters internship program which requires her to work in this same classroom. She will complete her degree in winter quarter 1997. The research this team is working on relates to characteristic studies through Newbery books. This entails moral education through quality children's literature. The teachers recently were trained using the Integrated Thematic Instruction Model as instructed by Susan Kovalik (1994). The ground work to this model is to provide an atmosphere in the classroom that fosters a sense of safety, warmth, and trust. The social behaviors that fosters this atmosphere are what Kovalik refers to as "LIFESKILLS". These are defined by Kovalik as "parameters that help the students evaluate their own performances--to guide them, individually and in groups, to an understanding of which social behaviors will enhance their success". "LIFESKILLS" are: integrity, initiative, flexibility, perseverance, organization, sense of humor, effort, problem-solving, responsibility, patience, friendship, curiosity, cooperation and caring. These are social behaviors that sixth grade teachers are currently teaching in their classes. The lessons that address social skills or moral development have included definitions, role-playing, reflective journaling, positive reinforcement through teacher recognition of the skills being used by students in their actions and in their class work, and children's literature.

Currently the two sixth grade classes have been studying "LIFESKILLS" and the definitions as posed in the ITI handbook. It is the team's intention to introduce characters from the Newbery

book choices and rank each character trait, both positive and negative. The students will work in their cooperative groups to discuss these traits using a ranking form provided to them. They will put together examples of these positive and negative traits. Comparisons across groups in each class will be made to reinforce the skills, to determine the depth of understanding and to compare similarities and differences. The Newbery Award book titles are: Dicey's Song, Sounder, Amos Fortune Free Man, Shen by the Sea, and Number the Stars.

Advantages of this partnership include the opportunity to be in the classroom and the experiences that provides. Miss Buskirk's extensive experience during her third year of undergraduate preparation at The Plains enabled her to feel ready to be a student teacher. She knows the children, and knows Mrs. Kroutel's teaching style. The disadvantages are her concerns with the time factor between the classroom and her Ohio University classes. She does not feel there is much flexibility with professors. Mrs. Kroutel feels that the advantages to the students, the Ohio University students and to her are wonderful. She feels that the partnership is a positive step toward performing teacher education. The special needs students in her room have someone to be there for them more frequently. For the college students it provides hands on experiences in real classroom situations. For the teacher, another professional is in the classroom to help.

Intern: Research Team 2. As mentioned earlier two teams are researching information in regards to social skills. The projects focus on implementing and developing life skills in students' lives. One action research project is being conducted by this team is in the area of reading. This team is comparing Reading Recovery strategies and traditional methods. The Reading Recovery strategy follows Mary Clay's Five Day Plan. The traditional methods include phonics, make/break words, high frequency words, and shared reading. The purpose is to find out if non-readers and emerging readers benefit more from Reading Recovery methods.

Miss Vranek is a first year student intern. She is working on a Masters in Education. Miss Vranek did her student teaching in this first grade class. This is beneficial because she knows the students with whom she is working. Mrs. Class feels there are many advantages to the partnership. Miss Vranek is working with a group of students who currently need the attention they are getting from her. The Five Day Plan includes a lot of repetition. They may not get this added attention if there was only one teacher in the room. Miss Vranek and Mrs. Class are able to try different strategies with all students because of this teacher/student ratio. Mrs. Class is very pleased with the partnership. Not only does she have a certified teacher in her room, she also has field experience students in her room on a consistent basis. Mrs. Class feels she is able to reach students faster and more often because of the Ohio University students in her room. There is more exposure to reading for her kids. These Ohio University students assist in many ways; they are read to more often, they participate in shared reading strategies, and they are able to edit student writing and journaling. The students allow her the opportunity to observe her children when they are working with a someone else. She would not be able to do so if there were not other adults in the room. Mrs. Class also thinks the partnership is a wonderful

program. Her concern is that if it is difficult for first year teachers to get a job, what will happen to the teachers that leave here with their Masters Degree.

Another action research project that is being conducted by this team is also in the area of "LIFESKILLS". This year is the second year that this team has worked together. Mr. Olinski was a student in the Plains Project and spent a quarter and half in Mrs. Yanity's fifth grade (she looped with her class). He also did his student teaching in her class in the fall. The winter and spring quarters he is in the masters program while they are actively involved in an action research project that focuses on implementing and developing life skills in students' lives. This research will contribute to Mr. Olinski's seminar paper.

The greatest benefits of this program as viewed by Mrs. Yanity have been the impact it has had on the children. Opportunities are available to plan activities and projects in the class. Being able to count on another professional has been valuable. Project students have helped with the students who need extra attention, assist in the teaching and planning and offer suggestions that only improve the teaching atmosphere. The opportunity to help shape and inspire beginning teachers has been a pleasure as well. This is their classroom for learning. The students are here, the situations are here, and the support is here. Mr. Olinski feels this partnership is a great way to learn to be a teacher.

Mr. Olinski has gained extra experience being in the classroom the last two years. The advantages of being in the building and having relationships with staff, visiting other rooms, and watching other professionals having teaching styles have all been great experiences for Mr. Olinski. The lab time for Mr. Olinski's classes are in the classroom with the students, not in a classroom with other college students. The bond that was established with the other Plains Project students has been positive and ongoing. "We can talk about something that is going on in a class, with a student, or about the class we are in and the other project students know what I am referring to. Some of the problems we are experiencing are the same and we can solve them or at least discuss where we need to go to get this taken care of."

Educational Importance: The educational importance of action research cannot be underestimated. Practitioners are doing the research. It is not being done to them. They are setting the agenda and they are making the choices. Action research leads to data driven decisions in the classroom and throughout the school. All of these issues encourage a professionalization of teaching; an issue with which educators continue to struggle.

The action research projects at The Plains allows both the classroom teachers and preservice teachers to place the notion of research into a realistic perspective. They learn that action research enables them to engage in some meaningful problem solving. Ultimately they gain a heightened understanding of the classroom and the school environment which leads to more informed decision making in the classroom. For these individuals, action research serves as a tool for empowerment. Most had never participated in research, so the sense of accomplishment and pride that is exhibited was a beautiful thing to see.

References

Campoy, R.W. (1996). Teacher education goes to school. The American School Board Journal, March, 32-34.

Catelli, L.A. (1995). Action research and collaborative inquiry in a school-university partnership. Action in Teacher Education, Winter, 25-38.

Corey, S. (1953). Action research to improve school practices. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fergus, E.O. & Wilson, C.D. (1994). Advancing educational equity through social action research: A collaborative effort between universities and schools. Equity & Excellence, Vol. 24, 38-45.

Herrick, M.J. (1992). Research by the teacher and for the teacher: An action research model linking schools and universities. Action in Teacher Education, Fall, 47-54.

Kovalik, S. (1994). ITI: The model. Washington: Books for Educators.

Mingus, V. (1996). Proposal submitted to Ohio's BEST practice.

Stein, J. (Ed). (1980). Random house college dictionary revised edition. New York: Random House Inc.